

**TESTIMONY  
of  
Sandy Markwood  
White House Conference on Aging  
Listening Session  
Washington, DC  
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Good afternoon, distinguished members of the White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee. I am Sandy Markwood, Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to share n4a's perspectives on the key issues that Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs would like to have addressed at the upcoming White House Conference on Aging.

n4a represents our nation's 655 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and is the representative body in Washington, DC, for the interests of 243 Title VI Native American aging programs. n4a advocates on behalf of its member agencies for enhanced services and resources for older adults and persons with disabilities in local communities nationwide. Recognizing that independence, dignity and choice are strongly held values by all Americans, n4a has long promoted the development of a service system that provides older consumers access to the most appropriate services in the least restrictive environment. In addition to advocacy, n4a also provides training, technical assistance and support to the national network of AAAs and Title VI organizations to assist them in their mission to build a society that values and supports people as they age.

n4a and our members realize that the 2005 White House Conference on Aging could not be coming at a more critical time. In 2006, the first wave of the baby boom generation will turn 60 and be eligible for Older Americans Act services. The aging of the baby boomers over the course of the next three decades will have a direct and dramatic impact on national, state and local policies, programs and services. Now is the time for individuals, families, communities and the nation as a whole to plan and prepare for the coming demographic explosion.

With the first of the 77 million baby boomers soon reaching retirement age and the current senior population experiencing a "longevity boom", we need to come together as a nation to guarantee that every older citizen in this country has the opportunity to live the most productive, healthy and enjoyable life possible. This guarantee, while challenging, is achievable and a strong base to support this goal already exists in the well-established system of federal, state and local entities that comprise the Aging Network.

For over 35 years, AAAs and Title VI aging programs have effectively and efficiently met the needs of millions of older adults. The Older Americans Act

(OAA), the primary funding source for many AAAs, has been the foundation of services for older adults throughout the country since its enactment in 1965 and forms the nucleus of a national system of home and community-based services. With the addition of the National Family Caregiver Support Program to the Older Americans Act in 2000, AAAs and Title VI agencies have been able to expand their service delivery system to serve the caregivers of older adults—who serve as the backbone of our nation's long term care system.

As the coordinators and providers of home and community-based services at the local level, AAAs and Title VI agencies have long recognized the critical importance of health promotion and prevention to ensuring the best quality of life possible. Older adults overwhelmingly report that they want to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. To achieve that goal, they need to engage in activities that promote healthy living. Good nutrition and physical activity both have been proven to play important roles in preventing or forestalling the onset of chronic conditions. As a partner in the Administration on Aging's new "You Can" Campaign, n4a and our network of AAAs and Title VI partners stand ready to assist older Americans lead more vital lives by helping them proper nutrition and appropriate exercise. We are also launching a partnership with the National Association of County and City Health Officials to promote stronger linkages between aging and health at the local level.

While we want to ensure that aging policy focuses greater attention to the critical link between nutrition and exercise and health promotion, we also recognize that most older adults will be in need of long term support services at some point. Aging policy in this nation needs to recognize and support the right of older adults to receive supportive services where they want to receive them—in their home. As the President noted in his budget this year, home and community based services are not only the overwhelming preference of older adults, they are also more cost effective than institutional care. n4a is working hard to strengthen and accelerate the efforts initiated by the Assistant Secretary for Aging to rebalance the national system of long term care in this nation away from its current institutional bias to a system that supports greater access to a continuum of home and community-based services.

In addition to coordinating and providing supportive services, AAAs also play a pivotal role in planning to address the needs of older adults and their caregivers. This role, a statutory requirement under the OAA, takes on increased importance when considering the imminent demographic shift of our nation. By their sheer numbers, the aging of the baby boom generation will impact the entire social, physical and fiscal fabric of communities. At this point, few communities are prepared to address the coming demographic explosion.

To assist our nation's communities meet the challenges and opportunities posed by the aging of the baby boomers on the broader community environment, n4a is proposing to add a new title to the Older Americans Act in next year's reauthorization of the law. The proposed new Title VIII would be a ten-year sunsetted provision which would target planning efforts in every Planning and

Service Area in the nation to assist communities develop the programs, policies and services needed to address the aging of the baby boomers and the increased longevity of the current population of older adults. The scope of community planning would include coordination of health, human services, housing, land use, transportation, public safety, environmental services, parks/recreation, along with lifelong learning, job retraining, and volunteerism/civic engagement—all key elements to ensuring the quality of life and well-being of older adults.

The last point—volunteerism/civic engagement-- is one n4a deems to be critical. Often in the aging arena we focus solely on addressing the needs of older adults, rather than considering the huge asset that older individuals are to the community. With the aging of the baby boomers, this nation will realize the healthiest, most educated and skilled older population in its history. Surveys conducted by AARP, Civic Ventures and others have noted that the baby boomers want to devote a substantial amount of time during their later years to community service or volunteer activities. As a nation, we need to ensure that meaningful community service opportunities are available to capitalize on the time, talent and wisdom of our growing national aging resource as well as prepare the private, public and non-profit sectors to successfully engage baby boomers.

In addition to civic engagement, another way for older adults to stay active and engaged is to remain employed. The baby boomer cohort identifies with their careers, equating their jobs with personal fulfillment and enjoys the sense of self-worth associated with being a contributing member of society. As the baby boomers age, studies have shown that more older adults want or may need to remain in the workforce. Furthermore, older workers bring to the labor market skills, knowledge and experience that are much needed if we are to remain competitive globally. As a nation, we need to assess our existing senior employment programs to determine if they will adequately address the needs of older workers in the future and, if not, to recommend policy changes to promote and support the recruitment, training and retention of the growing ranks of older adults who wish to remain employed.

The aging of the baby boomers poses great challenges and opportunities. We as a nation need to concentrate our efforts on promoting the health, security and productivity of the older citizens of today and tomorrow. n4a stands ready and committed to assist the Policy Committee in any way possible to address the policy implications of these challenges and opportunities and to work with you to ensure the success of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. To assist in this effort, the nation's AAAs and Title VI agencies are prepared to host listening sessions and pre-White House Conference events to maximize the reach and exposure of the White House Conference agenda into communities nationwide.

